

A Resilient Sufferer

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Preacher: Greg Gomang

[0:00] Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for your word from 2 Timothy 2, verses 3-13. Help me, Lord, to preach your word faithfully and clearly.

And let your word be an encouragement to us as we consider to live as followers of Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now every generation of Christians ask this question, why does following Christ feel so hard?

Why do trials, sufferings, opposition and even persecution seem to be woven into the fabric of Christian discipleship? It's very easy for us to buy into the comfortable myth that Jesus basically wants to make our lives easier, to make us happy and to take our troubles.

Now Jesus offers us a bright future to be sure, but Paul wants to remind us in these verses today that in the Christian life generally and in the gospel ministry especially, the pattern is suffering first, glory later.

Even Jesus himself told his disciples in John 15, verse 18 and 20, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

[1:20] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. Today's passage is part of Paul's second letter to Timothy, a young pastor. Earlier in chapter 1, Paul had appealed to Timothy to guard the good deposit, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Paul had passed on to him, that he in turn might pass it on to others faithfully.

And in doing so, Paul is telling Timothy that he will face suffering just as Paul is. Paul himself is in prison, awaiting execution, chained like a criminal.

And yet, rather than softening the message, Paul presses into it. He says to Timothy, Now notice he doesn't say, He doesn't say, He says, Because the road of suffering for Christ is not a detour.

It is the road itself. It is the normal Christian life. But if that's the normal Christian life, then it's easy to get tired, isn't it? Certainly, we saw last week in chapter 1, some of Paul's friends got tired and abandoned him and the gospel.

So, if this is the normal Christian life, how do we keep going? This entire section is a call to resilience. It is a call to faithful endurance in suffering, for the sake of the gospel.

[2:53] And it is not grounded in stoic willpower, but remembering Christ, trusting God's word, and hoping in the eternal glory to come. And friends, although this passage is directly written to Timothy, who is a gospel worker, by extension it applies to all Christians as well.

Because in many ways, we are also soldiers of Christ, as we seek to follow him, and to live for him. Now, suffering as a Christian may look different for each one of us.

It may mean losing your job, losing your friends, losing your face, being ridiculed, or even disowned by your own family, because of who you are in Jesus.

Let's now consider this passage together, as we seek to endure in suffering as Christians, in light of the coming glory. After Paul tells Timothy to join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus, he immediately offers three pictures that help us to understand what endurance in suffering looks like in practice.

They are not abstract theological concepts, they are vivid everyday images that Timothy, and perhaps we can immediately grasp. The soldier, the athlete, and the farmer.

[4 : 13] Now, why these three? Because together, they capture three different aspects of endurance. Single-mindedness, disciplined obedience, and perseverance.

Paul is not just telling Timothy to try harder. He is painting pictures that embody the kind of resilience the gospel produces. Now, let's look at each one. Paul begins with a soldier, join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. The first thing we notice is that a soldier's life is not easy.

Soldiers on active service do not expect a safe or easy time. They take hardship, risk, and suffering as a matter of course. Now, these things are part and parcel of a soldier's calling.

To enlist is to sign up for suffering. But notice the key word in verse 4, entangled. A soldier cannot afford to be entangled in civilian affairs.

[5 : 19] Now, that doesn't mean that everyday things are bad. It means that the soldier must be free from distractions that would compromise his mission. His singular goal is to please his commanding officer.

Now, for Timothy and for us, the point is clear. The Christian life is a life of single-minded devotion to Christ. We cannot endure if our loyalties are divided.

If our hearts are tangled in the cares of this world, status, wealth, comfort, approval, we will not last when suffering comes. Jesus said it plainly in Matthew 6, verse 24.

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

This is why endurance requires a kind of detachment. Not detachment from people or from love or from responsibility, but detachment from competing allegiances.

[6 : 22] A soldier's life is pared down to what matters most, and so must ours be. Now, here's the irony. Most of us think that the way to endure suffering is to hold on to as many comforts as possible.

Maybe we do so through possessions. If I have enough savings, I'll be okay no matter what happens. Or maybe we do it through relationships. As long as my friends and family are okay, I can endure anything.

But Paul says it's the opposite. The more entangled we are, the more fragile we become. Through endurance comes not clinging to everything, but from letting go of the lesser things in order to cling to Christ.

Now, brothers and sisters, let me ask you this question. What are the things in your life that entangle and distract you from God? Is it your money? Is it your possession?

Is it your status? Is it your career? Is it your relationship with others? Next, Paul turns to the athlete. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.

[7 : 36] If the soldier teaches us single-mindedness, the athlete teaches us discipline, obedience. It is likely that Paul refers here to ancient requirement that those who took part in the Olympic Games must underwent strict training for 10 months prior to the start of the Games.

Only those who put in the long, hard months of daily training could expect to take part in the Games, let alone to receive the victor's crown. No athlete, however brilliant, was crowned unless he had trained and competed according to the rules.

Now for Timothy and for us, this was a reminder that endurance is not just about zeal, it's about disciplined obedience. We cannot cut corners in the Christian life.

We cannot invent our own path. We must seek to be trained and run according to the gospel, not according to our own wisdom. Now friends, is there any moment in your life that you attempted to cut corners in living as a Christian?

hoping that you might avoid suffering and hardship? When you share the good news to others, are you tempted to water down the message in the gospel that it may not sound offensive to others and won't get you into trouble?

[8 : 50] Now this is a crucial point because in times of suffering, the temptation is always to compromise, to take the shortcut, to ban the truth, to ease the pressure.

But Paul says, not if you want the crown. Faithful endurance means staying within the boundaries of God's word. And notice how countercultural this is.

Our world says, endurance is about self-expression, about following your own truth, about breaking the rules to get ahead. But Paul says, endurance is submitting to Christ's truth, even when it costs you.

Finally, Paul gives us the farmer. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. If the soldier teaches single-minded devotion and the athlete teaches disciplined obedience, the farmer teaches patient perseverance.

Now my grandparents were farmers, so when I was a kid, when I got to visit them during the school holidays, I got a chance to see how they work. Farming is not easy, it's not glamorous, it is slow, repetitive and exhausting.

[10 : 00] You rise early, you labor long and you wait. You cannot speed up the harvest. You cannot control the rain or the sun. You can only sow, water, wheat and trust God to bring growth.

Now this may be the hardest lesson of all for endurance. Because most of us are not patient, we want instant results, quick fixes, immediate medication.

But gospel endurance is more like farming. You sow the seed of the word, you water it with prayer, you labor in faith and you wait, sometimes for years, before you see fruit.

But notice the promise in verse 6. The hard-working farmer is the one who gets to share first in the harvest. Endurance may feel thankless in the moment, but Paul assures us that God sees.

The labor is not in vain. The harvest will come. Brothers and sisters, are you tempted to give up in telling others about Jesus when there seems to be no response?

[11 : 05] Let's pull the three together. So what do these three images show us? They are not three separate lessons, they are three dimensions of one truth.

The Christian life requires endurance. Endurance is not glamorous, it is not easy, it is not instant, but it is worth it. Now, that's a truth that is not easy to believe right away, isn't it?

Maybe that's why Paul then pauses and says, Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight in all this. Next, Paul gives Timothy the central command, Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David, this is my gospel.

Now, friends, this is the heartbeat of endurance. This is why you can share in suffering. The command is not be strong, not try harder, but remember Jesus Christ.

Endurance flows not from our strength, but from our remembrance of him. And notice how Paul describes Jesus, raised from the dead. Jesus endured the cross and God raised him in triumph.

[12 : 20] If he is risen, then suffering does not have the final word. And if Jesus is risen, then that means Paul isn't a failure simply because he's sitting in prison.

Because if Jesus is true, his efforts are worth it. He will be the farmer who will see the harvest at the end of time. Descended from David, this reminds us that Jesus is the promised king, the Messiah who fulfills God's covenant.

His reign is certain. His promises are secure. When Paul says, descended from David, he is saying, you can endure because Jesus is not just alive.

He is reigning. He is the king who cannot be dethroned. Now Paul tells Timothy, when you are weary, when you are tempted to give up, when you are crushed by suffering, remember Jesus.

Remember though he died, yet he has risen and now reigning. Remember the gospel. Friends, Andrew is not simply a matter of willpower.

[13:26] It is a matter of who you fix your eyes on. So if you fix your eyes on the Romans, you might think they're the winners and you'll be tempted to go their side. If you fix your eyes even on Paul, you might think he's such a loser.

suffering in prison and you'll be tempted to cave in when opposition comes because you don't want his faith. But if you fix your eyes on Christ, whom you see is risen and reigning even after going through suffering, you will endure.

Now Paul then shifts from Jesus to his own example. He says, Here Paul shows us two reasons for endurance, the unstoppable power of the gospel and the mission of God.

First, the unstoppable power of the gospel. Paul is in chains, treated like a criminal. From the world's perspective, the gospel is losing, the messenger is silenced, the mission is defeated.

But Paul says, No, the word of God is not bound. You can chain the apostle, but you cannot chain the gospel. You can imprison the preacher, but you cannot imprison the truth.

[14:58] God's word runs free even when his servants are confined. Now this is why Paul endures. He knows that suffering cannot stop God's purposes. He knows that hardship cannot halt the advance of the gospel.

He knows that persecution is never the end of the story and so he keeps going. Second, Paul endures because of the mission of God. He says, Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Notice Paul's heart here. His endurance is not self-centered. He doesn't say, I endure so that I will look strong or I endure so that I will get the crown.

He says, I endure so that others may obtain salvation. His suffering is missionary. He is willing to endure at any cost so that others might hear the gospel and be safe.

Now this is so important for us because often when we think about endurance, we only think in terms of ourselves. How can I hold on? How can I survive?

[16:10] But Paul reminds us, gospel endurance is not just about me. It's about the salvation of others. My endurance becomes a testimony. My perseverance becomes a witness.

My suffering, united with Christ, can become the means by which others see the glory of the gospel. Friends, your endurance in suffering may be the very means by which someone else come to faith.

Your perseverance becomes a living testimony to the worth of Christ. When people see that you cling to Christ even in loss, they see a savior worth trusting.

And that means our trials and suffering are not wasted. They are woven into God's saving purposes. Endurance is not just about what God is doing in you.

It's also about what God is doing through you for the sake of others. Friends, do you see how God can use your suffering to reach out to others? Now, Paul concludes this section with many scholars believe it's an early Christian hymn.

[17:16] And what he does is summarise the paradox of the Christian life, the cause of endurance and the promise of glory. He writes, Here is a trustworthy saying, If we die with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Now, this hymn sets out both promise and warning. If we die with him, we will also live with him. To follow Christ means to die to self, to suffer with him.

But this death leads to life, resurrection life with Christ. If we endure, we will also reign with him. Endurance in suffering leads to glory.

Reigning with Christ is the destiny of those who persevere. If we disown him, he will also disown us. This is a sober warning.

[18:19] To deny Christ before man is to be denied before the Father. Apostasy brings eternal loss. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

God is faithful to his promises and his warnings. If we persist in faithlessness, he will deny us, for he cannot deny his own holy character.

Now, this hymn encapsulates the law of Christian life. Death precedes life, endurance precedes glory, denial brings judgment, but God remains unchangingly faithful.

Friends, do you truly believe in God's promises and heed his warnings? We've walked through Paul's word to Timothy. Now, the question comes, what does this mean for us?

What does it look like to endure suffering today? The first application is simple, but crucial. Be willing to share in suffering. Friends, so much of our struggle with suffering comes because we assume life should be easy.

[19:26] We think that if God loves us, he will shield us from hardship. But Paul reminds Timothy that suffering is not an intrusion of the Christian life.

It is a part of Christian life. Jesus himself said, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Now, that's not a maybe. It's a certainty. If you follow the crucified king, you will share in his rejection before you share in his glory. Here is when we need a mindset shift.

Instead of asking, why me? We learn to ask, why not me? If my savior suffered, if Paul suffered, if the church has always suffered, why would I expect a different path?

brothers and sisters, have the courage to take the harder path. Be willing to fight for the gospel because it is worth it. Second, don't lose your nerve by constantly remembering Jesus.

[20:33] We often lose our nerve because suffering and trials narrow our vision. When you're in pain, all you can see is the difficulty in front of you. That's why Paul says, leave your eyes, remember Jesus.

And here's the truth, whatever fills your memory will fuel your endurance. If you fix your eyes on your pain, your pain will consume you. If you fix your eyes on your enemies, your enemies will dominate you.

But if you fix your eyes on Christ, alive, reigning, victorious, your heart will find strength. Now this is why we need daily habits of remembering Christ, both personally and in church.

Scripture reading, prayer, gathering with the church, the Lord's Supper, these are not rituals to check off. These are ways to fix our eyes on Jesus so that when suffering comes, we have balance in the storm.

So, what does all this mean practically? How do we live as those who endure? Endurance looks like staying faithful when it's easier to compromise.

[21 : 43] In your workplace, when honesty costs you, when integrity makes you stand out, endurance means choosing faithfulness over convenience. Endurance looks like continual patience, unseen labor for the gospel.

Even when your friends seem disinterested or cultural hostility rises, endurance is continuing to pray and disciple others. Endurance looks like holding on even when others fall away.

Even when your peers are no longer zealous for Jesus or were still no longer live for him, endurance is joyfully serving Jesus, giving him your all.

In all these ways, endurance is not flashy. It's often quiet, unseen, ordinary faithfulness. But in God's eyes, it is glorious. Now finally, we must remember this, endurance is not just about us, it's not about us proving ourselves to God, it's about us being united to the one who endured for us.

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 to 2 says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race mark out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

[23 : 14] For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Now Jesus is the true soldier who fought the battle and won.

He is the true athlete who ran the race and received the crown. He is the true farmer who sold his life in death and ripped a harvest of salvation. And because he endured, we can endure.

His endurance secures ours. His victory guarantees ours. And that means the call to endure is not a crushing burden. It is a gospel invitation.

You are not enduring to earn his love. You are enduring because you already have his love. You are not enduring to secure salvation. You are enduring because salvation is already secured in him.

And you are also enduring because you want others to know this and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. So brothers and sisters, let us endure, not in despair, but in hope.

[24 : 18] as Paul says in verse 12, if we endure, we will also reign with him. For the Lord who calls you is faithful and he will surely do it. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for your word today that has reminded us that we are to share in suffering as your people.

Thank you for showing us the great example of our Lord Jesus who himself suffered to the point of dying on the cross but now has reason to be king over all things.

Help us, Lord, to fix our eyes upon him, knowing that he will return in glory and we will also be glorified and will reign with him.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.